

Photospot:

An intermediate form of Hairy-breasted Barbet *Tricholaema hirsuta*

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Une forme intermédiaire du Barbican hérissé *Tricholaema hirsuta*. Deux des quatre sous-espèces du Barbican hérissé *Tricholaema hirsuta* possèdent une tête noire avec deux traits blancs bien prononcés, tandis que les deux autres ont la tête finement tachetée et striée, sans traits blancs. La race nominale *hirsuta*, qui s'étend de la Sierra Leone au centre-sud du Nigéria, appartient aux formes possédant les traits blancs, tandis que la race *flavipunctata*, qui occupe le sud-est du Nigéria jusqu'au Cameroun (excepté le sud-est) et le centre du Gabon, a le dessus de la tête marqué de petits points jaunes et la face et la gorge très finement striées, formant un ensemble assez gris. Des formes intermédiaires de ces deux sous-espèces se trouvent toutefois de l'est du Ghana au sud-ouest du Nigéria. Les photos reproduites ici, prises au Parc national d'Okomu, au sud-ouest du Nigéria, montrent un tel oiseau de forme intermédiaire.

Morphological variation in the Hairy-breasted Barbet *Tricholaema hirsuta* affects mainly the pattern of the head and throat. Some populations possess a black crown and face with a white stripe above and behind the eye and a second on the throat-side, whilst other populations lack these stripes and have instead pale spotting covering the otherwise black or brownish-black crown and face. Current taxonomic orthodoxy recognises four subspecies, of which two have

white head-stripes. Thus, nominate *hirsuta*, which ranges from Sierra Leone to south-central Nigeria (in the Niger Delta region), has no spotting on the crown or nape and, in the male, a black throat (throat feathers reputedly tipped whitish in the female). The race *ansorgii* extends from south-east Cameroon east to western Kenya, north-west Tanzania and southern DR Congo, and differs from nominate in having the white head-stripes narrower, the chin and throat conspicuously



Figures 1–2. Hairy-breasted Barbet *Tricholaema hirsuta*, intermediate form *hirsuta* / *flavipunctata*, Okomu National Park, Nigeria, February 2005 (A. P. Leventis)

Barbican hérissé *Tricholaema hirsuta*, forme intermédiaire *hirsuta* / *flavipunctata*, Parc national d'Okomu, Nigeria, février 2005 (A. P. Leventis)

streaked white, and yellow spotting extending from the back onto the nape and, sometimes, the crown. The colours of the body are also less intense; thus, it has brownish-black, rather than black, upperparts and the yellow belly is duller. Geographically interposed between them, from south-east Nigeria to Cameroon (except the south-east) and central Gabon, is *flavipunctata*, which has the face blackish with whitish spots and yellow spotting or narrow streaking covering the forehead, crown and nape. Below, the belly of *flavipunctata* is very dull yellow with predominantly brown, not black, markings. Lastly, *angolensis*, from southern Gabon and south Congo to north-west Angola and southern DR Congo, has a brownish crown, pale streaky spots on the face and a brownish-white throat with darker barring; *angolensis* also differs conspicuously from the other races in being much the brownest of the four, with little yellow on the breast and belly (Short & Horne 1988, 2001, 2002).

The nominate race and *flavipunctata* do, however, intergrade across a broad region extending from eastern Ghana, through Togo to south-west Nigeria (Short & Horne 1988, 2001, 2002). The accompanying photographs (Figs. 1–2), taken in Okomu National Park, south-west Nigeria, by A. P. Leventis, are of such a bird. It shows the conspicuous white supercilium and moustachial stripe of nominate *hirsuta* as well as the black ground colour to the upperparts. However, the yellow spotting on the nape, central crown, forehead and, in Fig. 2, faintly on the ear-coverts and below the eye, as well as the whitish throat with dark streaking, are characters more typical of *flavipunctata*.

These intermediate forms have long been known and, indeed, named. Their taxonomic history is, however, confused and does not need to be revisited here. Suffice to say that these intergrades have largely been overlooked in more recent liter-

ature and these photographs serve as cautionary reminders of their existence. It seems that there is much still to be learned of the status and distribution of the races of *T. hirsuta*. Indeed, it appears that some confusion even remains over sexual dimorphism in nominate *hirsuta*. For example, Bates (1930) suggested that the throat of the female is whitish streaked black whilst in the male it is uniformly black. This was disputed by Bannerman (1933) who thought that both sexes were dark-throated. This still does not seem to have been resolved as, in the more recent standard works, whilst there is no mention of a sexual difference in throat colour in Borrow & Demey (2001) or Short & Horne (1988, 2001), Short & Horne (2002) state such a difference *does* exist and illustrate it. Further field work is clearly called for!

References

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